

Resonant Frequency

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/22206673) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/22206673>.

Rating:

[General Audiences](#)

Archive Warning:

[No Archive Warnings Apply](#)

Category:

[Gen](#)

Fandom:

[Batman - All Media Types](#)

Relationship:

[Tim Drake & Bruce Wayne](#)

Characters:

[Tim Drake](#), [Bruce Wayne](#)

Additional Tags:

[Tim Drake Needs a Hug](#), [Tim Drake Angst](#), [Bruce Wayne is a Good Parent](#), [Jack Drake is dead](#), (and therefore not present—just giving a time frame here), [Bruce Wayne Tries](#), [Bruce Wayne is healing](#), [brief mention of the Justice League](#), [Nightmares](#), [Hurt/Comfort](#), [Abandonment Issues](#)

Language:

[English](#)

Series:

Part 6 of [The Returnverse](#)

Collections:

[How DC Should Be](#), [100/10 *chefs kiss*](#) (batfam edition), [Los mejores fics que he leído de DC Cómics](#)

Stats:

Published: 2020-01-11 Words: 2,123 Chapters: 1/1

Resonant Frequency

by [lurkinglurkerwholurks](#)

Summary

Tim stood at the end of the hall, facing the window that overlooked the lawn. He stood in the dark, his reflection faded and warped, the barest shine from the moon above catching his face in the glass. He was so quiet, so still, that Bruce had almost missed him.

——Can be read as a standalone——

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Tim stood at the end of the hall, facing the window that overlooked the lawn. He stood in the dark, his reflection faded and warped, the barest shine from the moon above catching his face in the glass. He was so quiet, so still, that Bruce had almost missed him.

That happened more times than Bruce felt comfortable admitting, him glossing over Tim's presence in the house. After the long, cold emptiness of before, having the heartbeat of a living boy fill the Manor often felt like a full marching band trumpeting down the corridor. On those days, Tim was a symphony, his existence pulling Bruce out to dance with the world. Bruce would be trapped in his own head, then look down and see a pair of sneakers haphazardly discarded in a corner or hear the far-off echo of laughter, and Bruce would be startled to find himself alive.

But other days, Tim was too quiet. He was a considerate boy by nature, self-contained, too worried about being a bother, so he would pad from room to room on silent feet or tuck himself into a corner where he would be out of the way. It had been months since Jack's death, months since Bruce had done what he swore he would never do again and taken in another son. It had been months, and Bruce worried, when he allowed himself to think about it, that Tim would never fully settle in. On the quiet days, Bruce would lose himself in his work until the ends of him tingled with numbness and his brain sat stuffed with fog. On quiet days was when he felt most like the bad times, sinking down into the mist and the dark that waited below. Then he would turn a corner and see a moppish head of black hair bent over a book or swaying to music locked inside headphones, and it would feel like stepping straight from February chill into full summer sun.

They were good for each other in many ways—Tim more for Bruce than the other way around, and Bruce was first to admit it. He needed the counterbalance. He needed the gravity that came from the weight of wide young eyes and the responsibility of care. He needed the heartbeat in the halls.

But there were also ways in which they synced too well, like a resonant frequency building out of control. When they both retreated into their own heads, Bruce was slow to notice, slow to release himself from the drag of inertia. Bruce had to remind himself that not every little boy need swing from chandeliers. It was not Tim's job to fix him. It was not his responsibility to pull Bruce from his mental hermitage. It was *his* job—Bruce's job, the parent's job—to be aware of his son.

Yet still there were days, like this quiet night, when it was only by chance that Bruce noticed something was wrong.

Bruce had gotten out of bed, roused by nothing in particular. He had worries, but none more outsized than was usual. He was tired, but nothing beyond the familiar fatigue curled permanently in his marrow. He had stared at the ceiling for a time, watching the flat and featureless shadow that spread from corner to corner, before finally giving up and reaching for his robe.

He hadn't formulated a full plan yet beyond shuffling to the kitchen to stare blankly into the white glow of the open fridge, and had been pointed in that direction when the shape in the corner of his vision snared his attention. It had taken time for the shape to coalesce in the moon-spattered dark, and once it had, Bruce found it made less sense than he had hoped.

Bruce changed direction and followed the carpet runner down the center of the corridor until he stood behind Tim, the barest highlights of his face appearing in the glass above his son's.

Tim wore his pajamas, a mismatched set of rumpled sweatpants and a baggy graphic tee. The t-shirt was slumped sideways, the collar bagging to bare a sliver of shoulder. His hair was still wild with sleep, smashed and spiky from the pillow. His feet were bare. The sight bothered Bruce for no reason he could name.

"Tim?"

Tim didn't turn. Bruce didn't see anything on the lawn beyond, nothing that could be catching the boy's attention. Then he noticed the silvery tracks down Tim's face. The boy had a knack for crying without a sound. Bruce had only witnessed it once or twice before, and he wondered how much of that skill came from practice. It broke his heart every time.

"Bad dream?" Bruce asked softly.

Tim's breath stuttered as he inhaled, his only audible concession to the new tear that slipped down his face. "I hope so," he whispered.

Bruce's inclination was to step closer, but he stayed perfectly still. The nightmares in this house could wear many forms, and what might feel close and comforting after one horror might feel suffocating after another.

“Would you like to talk about it?”

Tim didn't shake his head like Bruce thought he might. He didn't even blink. He just stared out across the dark and tree-shadowed landscape. No, not at the lawn. His gaze stopped at the window, at his own pale and faded reflection.

“I dreamed you forgot about me.” The confession was soft, almost lilting, as if Tim had retreated so far from the trauma that he had come untethered from himself.

The whispered words hit Bruce like a fist, but Tim was still speaking. “I was here, but the Manor was empty. I walked from room to room, looking for you and Alfred, but you were gone. The house was so empty and so cold. Everything was covered in long white sheets like ghosts. And then I realized I was, too.”

Tim was shivering still, Bruce realized, a portion of his mind at work even as the rest sank with the frozen horror of Tim's dream.

There were corners of each of his sons' pasts that remained shrouded to him. Some of these secrets were left in the hope that, in time, they would feel comfortable enough to tell him themselves. That had been the gambit with Jason and the many commonplace monsters of his life with his mother. Those hidden memories were lost to Bruce now, though he didn't regret his reserve. But with Tim, Bruce's motives were not so empathetic.

He was a coward.

Bruce knew without asking the silhouette of Tim's childhood with the Drakes. He could follow the damage of their perpetual absences like bodies beneath an open trapdoor. And that would be a bearable grief if Bruce didn't know that Tim had suffered even as he walked the path to the Manor's front door. Bruce could have saved Tim that suffering if he had bothered to lift his head.

If he had been less consumed by his own grief. If, before, he had been less enraptured with his own joy.

I hope so, Tim had said. A nightmare could be lived and ended, a cobwebbed dream to be swept away. But fear would whisper that it was more.

Bruce would carry the years he couldn't change, and he would do his best to prevent the Drakes' damage from spreading, regardless of how

paltry his best could be.

Bruce shrugged off his robe and wrapped it around Tim's shoulders. The touch was enough, releasing Tim like a hammer to glass. Bruce caught his balance and his breath as Tim whirled, threw his arms around Bruce's midsection, and clung tightly. It was his first hug since Tim had come to live at the Manor.

"I'm not going to forget you." Bruce wasn't one for promises. Words were hard-won for him and easily dismissed; actions carried more weight. But when he did commit himself to words, he did not break them.

"Tim," Bruce repeated. "I'm *not* going to forget you."

Another tear spilled down Tim's cheek and soaked into the cotton of Bruce's shirt. "But what if you leave and don't come back?"

The promise that he would *always* come back burned on Bruce's lips like an ember in a gripped fist, but he held it tight. Every night, there was the possibility that it was his last night leaving the Cave. Even on the brightest day, he could step out his front door for the last time. He couldn't promise he wouldn't. The last of the Waynes could not make that promise.

Instead, Bruce wrapped his arms around Tim, hesitantly at first, then tightly enough that he could feel Tim's heart beating against his ribs.

"If I can come back, I will," he promised as he pressed a kiss against Tim's scalp. "If I can come back, I will *always* come back."

The lights hurt his head.

It was easier to focus on the pain than to accept that he didn't know where he was.

Didn't know *when* he was.

There were people around him, and he didn't know who they were, but a whisper in the back of his mind said they were allies. That the blue and the red and the green meant safety.

So he didn't fight, except the one time he wrenched away to vomit over the side of the bed.

Cot.

The thin metal rail made it a cot.

Quarantine.

He couldn't remember what the word meant, only that it rarely meant anything good. It meant danger, but not to him. To others. It meant waiting. He didn't know if he could wait. Waiting involved time, and time was what he didn't have enough of. Or was it that he had too much?

He was pretty sure he was muttering these things out loud, words slipping like water through a dike. One of the people—one of the blue-and-reds without green—kept eyeing him worriedly, a crease across their brow. He thought he had been quiet. He was sure he had been quiet.

He wished he could remember who they were.

Bruce—his name was Bruce, he remembered that now—squinted and rubbed at his eyes. The light disappeared behind his hand for a moment, and he felt relief, but he couldn't stay that way. He needed to know where he was. When he was.

He blinked away and tried to look again. The room was still white. The people were still busy. One blue-and-red was in the room with him, along with a truly green—green face, green chest, green hands. The other people were beyond, behind a wall of glass that he only now noticed. They were looking at screens, or looking through the glass at him, their words echoing over a speaker above the bed. They were asking him questions that fuzzed and staticked through years of delay.

Bruce's gaze swept across the space, then snagged. There was a boy standing before the glass. He wore a strange outfit of red and black and gold with a cape of midnight. His face was pale, blue eyes wide, and his fingers spasmed into anxious fists at his side. Bruce doubted the boy knew he was moving at all.

He needs a haircut, was Bruce's first thought, followed by *He's gotten taller*.

He looked frightened. Bruce wanted to tell him that it was all going to be okay. He didn't know why. *He* didn't know everything would be okay, so why would he worry about consoling this strange boy with the sad eyes and frightened face?

Bruce didn't know, until he did.

He smiled, the name as sweet in his mouth as the sunrise.

"Tim."

On the other side of the glass, the boy mouthed, *Bruce*.

The other people, the nameless friends, buzzed about them, but Bruce paid them no mind. Their memories would return in time, as they came at their own pace. Tim was the one he needed to remember.

The glass fogged with Tim's breath. He pressed one hand flat against the surface, as if straining to break through. *Bruce*, he repeated, voice stripped away by the soundproofing of quarantine.

"I came back."

He needed the boy to know this, to hear it. He couldn't remember why. That he remembered Tim—sweet, clever, stubborn, vibrant Tim—was enough for now.

"I came back," Bruce repeated, loudly.

He ached to hold his son, to cup the face trapped behind glass, to press a kiss into sweaty hair. These weren't memories of his addled mind but muscle memories, strong and sure and crisp. Bruce could do none of these things yet. He wasn't even sure Tim could hear him as he repeated himself again and again—*I came back*.

End Notes

Happy birthday, Chi!

Also, this fic was written with "Everything I Wanted" by Billie Eilish and "Haunted Heart" by Christina Aguilera playing NON-STOP in my head. I don't know why. Only by writing this have I freed myself.

2025 ETA: Written as a true standalone but this fic inspired the next one in the "series," which kicked off a whole spiderweb of interconnected standalones. Wowza.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!